Hajj to the Heart

Kugle, Scott

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Appraising the Ka'ba never ceased to awe him, even though he came almost daily since arriving in Mecca from India. As he sat down next to his shaykh in the midst of a vast study circle in the shadow of the black shrine, he regained his composure. He recalled how, when he first stepped foot in the holy city almost three years ago, he was overwhelmed. Yet after circling the Ka'ba and visiting the Prophet's tomb in Medina, his ardor cooled and his reason returned. He began to study hadith with 'Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi, to whom he now bowed low in respectful greetings before sitting in the study circle.

Learning traditions about the Prophet's actions and attitudes, in the very place where the Prophet was born and raised, filled his heart with wonder. Gradually, he found that his teacher was not merely a master of hadith but also a spiritual mentor and guide. He quickly became the shaykh's strongest disciple, even though he was new to the circle of scholarly devotees in Mecca. As he sat in the gathering next to his teacher, the other students gazed at him with respect or mouthed greetings silently, so as not to interrupt the teachings.

As the culmination of his Sufi training, Shaykh 'Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi sent him into a secluded retreat for forty days, checking in on him every Friday after leaving home to offer congregational prayers at the Ka'ba's sanctuary. Removing him from seclusion, 'Abd al-Wahhab pronounced, "Praise be to God, your spiritual state is ripened as it should be." His disciple returned the next day to the hadith study circles, as if his life would continue in Mecca as it had been. He took his place sitting beside the shaykh at the Maqam Hanafi overlooking the Ka'ba, one of hundreds of students and disciples who came
to learn the Prophet’s sayings and deeds with all their detailed chains of narration and subtleties of authentication.

That day, the shaykh began discussing a report from the hadith collection titled *Sahih Muslim*: “A dead man leaves behind three things as a legacy: family, wealth and good deeds. Of these, two things return while one remains: family and wealth eventually return to God but one’s deeds remain as one’s legacy in the world.” Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhab paused as tears filled his eyes. “I have no family and no wealth, and my good deeds are few! What will be my legacy?” He turned to his disciple, saying, “You, ‘Abd al-Haqq, you will be my legacy! Go back to your home now, for your wife and children are waiting anxiously for you, and they will be relieved to see you again. Get ready to return to India.”

The disciple, ‘Abd al-Haqq, was startled to hear this command. His heart sank, but regaining his composure, he replied, “I intended to remain here in this holy land to learn from you, but if you send me from here then I desire to go to Baghdad to visit the tomb of Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani!” Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhab responded to his favorite student and closest disciple, “You cannot remain here any longer, and there is no possibility for you to go anywhere other than your own place of origin! The *shari‘a* can be practiced anywhere, and ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani is with you wherever you reside. Keep firm your love for him, faith in him, and concentration on him. Resolve in your heart to follow his teachings wherever you are. He would never be content with you if you leave your mother, your wife, and your young children in a state of anxiety and need! Besides, you told me that your mother gave you permission to visit Mecca and Medina after you promised her to not go to any third place, so how can you go elsewhere?”

The disciple humbly averred, “But I made the intention in my heart to visit Baghdad and it is on the way back to India, so in reality it does not count as a third locale.” His shaykh replied, “That is true enough, if you could simply stay there for a short time as if it were stopping in the midst of an ongoing journey. But is it possible for you to stop in Baghdad without doing a forty-day retreat there? If you stay for that long, your desire to remain there for an extended time will grow uncontrollably—it will be impossible for you to pull away. Your journey to Baghdad will become extended. Your family will suffer ruin while waiting for you.”

Desperate to stay in his Sufi master’s circle, ‘Abd al-Haqq implored, “Please turn your spiritual attention to this issue, and then tell me whatever is best for me.” The shaykh replied sternly, “Inshallah, it is always good for you to do *istikhara*, to make a special prayer for divine guidance, but it is already clear
that what is best for you is to return right now to your own place and family!”

ʿAbd al-Haqq rose in bewilderment—leaving his books on the ground where he had been sitting at his privileged place next to the shaykh—and headed out of the study circle on unsteady feet. All the students watched him, some with sympathy and some with jealousy, as he walked slowly, with uncertainty, out of the sanctuary.

ʿAbd al-Haqq later recorded these events in the biography of his Sufi masters, ʿAli Muttaqi and his successor, ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi. The former had sojourned to study in Mecca and settled there, after twice attempting to return as a reformer to Gujarat. The latter had traveled to study in Mecca and settled there for good, after returning to India only to face assassination attempts. Their new and zealous follower ʿAbd al-Haqq wished to stay on in Mecca to follow in their footsteps and felt anxious about his prospects in returning to India. Yet in his formal account, ʿAbd al-Haqq carefully edited out emotions of uncertainty, disappointment, and doubt.

During the time when I was living in Mecca and serving Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi, I used to occasionally visit the tomb of Shaykh ʿAli Muttaqi. One day, while sitting by his noble tomb, I presented the troubled state of my heart and humbly requested that he grant me insight for a solution to my anxieties. That night while sleeping, I saw in a dream Shaykh ʿAli Muttaqi on a seat of authority at the Maqām Ḥanafī [a place in the courtyard of the Haram to the right side of the Kaʿba when approached from the Bāb al-Salām and Maqām Ibrāhīm]. 3 I stood in his august presence and said, “I, a poor mendicant, am a follower of your successor and representative, Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhab; for his sake, please accept my humble request…” Then he turned to me with kind consolation, and I said to him exactly what I had been thinking while sitting at the side of his grave earlier that day. He replied, “Your request is granted, if God wills—just keep your thoughts concentrated and you’ll attain what you seek. Go in peace and safety!”

ʿAli Muttaqi left behind a vivid legacy after he died. Indeed, some of his followers continued to experience his guidance in visions and dreams long after he was buried. His followers, admirers, and detractors shaped his legacy through worldly activities in succeeding generations. This chapter is a satchel containing elements of the personas and activities of his followers as they pursued his principles of reformist Sufism in their own changed surroundings. Its
contents even include ‘Ali Muttaqi’s own “death satchel,” which was finally unpacked by his followers upon his demise.

As the hadith report quoted above explains, “In this world, we leave behind our deeds, our pious efforts and charitable activities.” ‘Ali Muttaqi lived with an acute awareness of this hadith and its consequences, and he strove to shape the world through reformist Sufism and hadith scholarship to leave an active legacy. After ‘Ali Muttaqi died, his followers and disciples extended his reform project and built a community around him as their guiding saint, thereby reacting to new local environments and political developments. We can document the legacy of ‘Ali Muttaqi through the activities of his major disciples. Three figures were important in transmitting ‘Ali Muttaqi’s legacy back to South Asia: ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi, Muhammad ibn Tahir Patani, and ‘Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi. Hagiographic and historical records preserve the stories of these three figures in detail. The life of ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi was already discussed in the third satchel as he embodied the teachings of ‘Ali Muttaqi; he lived in such self-abnegation that it is as if his life were an extension of his master’s very life. The latter two will be documented in this chapter because they returned to South Asia and died there.

‘Ali Muttaqi’s disciples endeavored to transpose his reformist Sufi community to South Asia. In Gujarat, the reform project was mired in social conflict and violence with the Mahdawi movement and fell into disarray as Gujarat’s independent polity was subsumed by the Mughal Empire under Akbar. In this new political and cultural climate, his later followers transported the legacy of ‘Ali Muttaqi to Delhi, the heart of the Mughal polity that he had abhorred. The youngest Muttaqi disciple, ‘Abd al-Haqq (whose story is recounted above), refashioned the important elements of this reform program into a form more suitable to the new environment—in returning to India he became known as Shaykh ‘Abd al-Haqq, the Hadith Master of Delhi. This entailed abandoning allegiance to the triple tariqa that had been the distinctive marker of this reformist community, making ‘Ali Muttaqi’s reform project more broadly effective and more subtly hidden. That moment marks the historical dissolution of this distinctive community.

Threshold: ‘Ali Muttaqi’s Death

When ‘Ali Muttaqi left Gujarat for good, it seems that divine protection was lifted from its sultanate. Mahmud Shah III and his realm were exposed to grave danger, first from within and then from outside. After the sultan’s death in a lust-driven coup, ‘Ali Muttaqi’s personal connection to Gujarat dissolved.
In Mecca, he entered the twilight of his life. After Mahmud Shah III died and ‘Ali Muttaqi’s political ties to Gujarat were severed, the Sufi scholar lived in Mecca for thirteen more years. His khanqah hosted visiting pilgrims from South Asia, his Sufi followers, and countless students of hadith. He continuously worked on his huge hadith book *Kanz al-ʿUmmāl*: until his dying breath, he kept revising his magnum opus, taking hadith reports from al-Suyuti’s *Jamʿ al-Jawāmi* and organizing them into legal subject categories in order to facilitate their use in juridical decisions and devotional reforms. Yet he grew so weak in this last chapter of life, from prior ascetic rigors and fasting, that his followers had to carry him to the mosque for Friday communal prayers.

In his old age, ‘Ali Muttaqi established his community and built its institutions in Mecca. Thus, he no longer needed to rely on the remnants of his past in Gujarat and the Deccan. To expunge memories of uncertainty, he revised his own past in a series of acts of repression, dismissal, and disguise. He suppressed the memory of his own search for authenticity once he had found a version that made sense. He dismissed his youthful quest for inspiration through the annals of Chishti masters. And he repressed his prior admiration for the Mahdawis. These acts of repression were the aftershocks of his experiences of spiritual rebirth and social reconstruction in Mecca.

The last year of his life held bizarre events and ironic reversals that can only be understood as a “return of the repressed” (a concept from psychoanalysis that Freud discussed in *Moses and Monotheism*). After several severe illnesses, ‘Ali Muttaqi displayed some uncharacteristic behavior that inverted his normal comportment. In temporary fits, he experienced poetic ecstasies and feelings of cosmic, oceanic unity, akin to what he had dismissed regarding the Chishti masters of his youth and what he had critiqued in the Shattari Sufis during his mature years. During one such fit, ‘Ali Muttaqi requested his successor, ‘Abd al-Wahhab, to recite for him a Persian couplet by Amir Khusro that is sung in Qawwali: “Never will I see a vision finer than your face’s luminous beauty / I know no sun or moon as radiant, as lovely no human or fairy.” His biographer, ‘Abd al-Haqq, recalls the whole incident that followed this return to repressed elements of his childhood environment.

When ‘Ali Muttaqi heard these words, a strange state overwhelmed him. He called out, “Recite it again—recite it again and again!” ‘Abd al-Wahhab repeated it several times, and ‘Ali Muttaqi responded with expressions of loving ecstasy and heaved passionate sighs. In these last days, he was so weak that he could hardly chew his food, so he requested his servant to knead the food to make it soft. While this ecstatic state still possessed him, the servant brought his meal and ‘Ali Muttaqi watched him knead
the rice and gravy into a smooth paste. At the vision of this union of opposites and mingling of discrete substances, he called out for the servant to “knead it harder—keep kneading until all becomes one and there exists no duality or separation!” Transported by this domestic scene of existential love, he uttered a poetic couplet of his own inspiration.⁷

Listen to the poetry told of the divine beauty’s essence:

Life of bride and groom mingles like sweet rice and milk.

It is next to impossible to translate this couplet into English, for it speaks on three levels at once. The first level is about a simple dish in which rice is kneaded until soft and mixed with sweetened milk. Yet this domestic imagery leaps into higher, theological registers. This dish is dūdḥ-bḥāt, a dish presented to newly married couples as their first symbolic meal together, suggesting their imminent sexual intimacy. Yet the subject of the couplet is also param, the divine absolute essence. The convention of Indic devotional poetry is that the poet is like a bride offering herself to the groom, who represents the divine beloved. In this way, a simple observation of softened rice evokes sensuous spirituality of love integrated with a philosophical message of existential union between God and the created world.

The couplet itself is common enough, for South Asian saints peppered their teachings with such poems and often uttered by them in trancelike states of selfless union with the divine beloved. Yet, it is surprising that ‘Ali Muttaqi abandoned himself to such a state, for he habitually rejected poetry as an expression of sainthood and advocated silence about the metaphors of love and experiences of union that inspired them. He once even had a poet forcibly removed from his khanqah in Mecca when his metaphors became too exaggerated!⁸ ‘Ali Muttaqi momentarily inverted his lifelong rejection of practices that characterized the Chishti and Shattari communities. Sparked by this couplet, his ecstatic state persisted while he spoke out in more expressions of love and passion. ‘Abd al-Wahhab had to stay by his side day and night to care for him.

This illness in the last months of his life displays a more dramatic moment of the “return of the repressed.” ‘Ali Muttaqi became possessed by the intuition that he was himself the Mahdi, the exact claim for which he had so thoroughly critiqued Sayyid Muhammad Jawnpuri. He acted upon this intuition with a zeal that totally surprised his colleagues and followers, who had thought him ill enough to die. One of his students, Qadi Hamid Muhaddith, related this story in detail, for he was present with him at the onset of this strange spiritual state.⁹
A serious illness inflicted Shaykh 'Ali Muttaqi. It was so intense that all thought he had neared the end of his life and that there was little hope of living on. Everyone was awaiting news of the shaykh’s death and were making preparations to attend his funeral.

Suddenly at dawn, he exhibited signs of an intoxicated spiritual state. He summoned a follower and asked, “Do you bear witness that I am sincere in what I now declare?” The follower attested to this. Then Shaykh 'Ali Muttaqi declared, “I am the Mahdi of the End of Time. Declare that you believe me and accept this.” Then he requested the presence of 'Abd al-Qādir al-Fākīhī, one of the greatest scholars and jurists of Mecca who was eloquent, intelligent, and from a renowned scholarly family. He was a devoted follower of 'Ali Muttaqi, a firm lover of his, and his disciple. . . .

The shaykh said “'Abd al-Qādir, bear witness that I am sincere in what I now say.” He agreed and then the shaykh said again, “I declare that I am the Promised and Expected Mahdi!” 'Abd al-Qādir bore witness to his declaration.

Shaykh 'Ali Muttaqi stood up as if he were not weak at all, though he had been so sick only moments before that he had been unable to stand and it appeared that no life remained in him except his last dying breath. Now, his power of motion had returned to the point that he stood up and went to take a full bath with cold water [a full ablution since he felt he was no longer sick]. He put on white clothes, placed his notebook on his head, took up his staff in his hand, and went out toward the Ka'ba. He moved so swiftly that it was as if he were flying; nobody was able to keep up with him.

He entered the sacred enclosure on Friday morning when a huge crowd had gathered inside. Before this throng, he declared three times with a loud voice, “I am the Promised Mahdi!” Everyone was stunned that Shaykh 'Ali Muttaqi, so pious and scrupulous, should make so bold a claim. Asaf Khan, the prime minister of Gujarat, was present at the time, having been expecting the shaykh’s funeral. He said secretly to his aids that the shaykh must be in a fever and ordered some trusted people to take him aside and keep him safely in an isolated corner, away from the crowds. However, 'Ali Muttaqi shook himself free of his would-be protectors. He rushed over to Abu'l-Hasan al-Bakri, who was shocked that, at the very moment when all the people were awaiting his death, the shaykh was here in the sacred enclosure. He wondered from where this bodily vigor had come and thought that today, the shaykh has returned from the dead.
Passion, wherever it turns its face, in truth transforms an old man into vigorous youth

Shaykh Abūl-Ḥasan al-Bakrī rose to greet him, as was his custom in the circle of hadith studies, indicating that ‘Alī Muttaqī should sit on his own raised seat. [Normally he would decline] but today, he ascended and sat there, saying, “As for today, yes, I will sit here above you all, for today is my day. Today is my day of inerrant guidance [ʾiṣma] and absolute authority. Today I have been granted the most exalted position.”

Tumult has knocked on my heart’s door today a lover’s insanity inhabits my mind today lowly beggars don’t have an inkling of the fact that the Lord of the World is with me today!

ʿAlī Muttaqī asked Abūl-Ḥasan al-Bakrī to bear witness that he was the Mahdi, and he immediately agreed. Then he turned to his son, Muḥammad al-Bakrī, and asked him to do the same, but he hesitated. Abūl-Ḥasan quickly said, “My son, don’t hesitate a moment but bear witness to the sincerity of his claim, for the man is in a trance-like state and is not conscious of his actions!”

I don’t say “I’m the Truth”—my heart-friend says it. How could I not say it when my dear Lover says it!\(^{10}\)

Shaykh ʿAlī Muttaqī said, “Now, all that is left is to spread this claim among the people in order to get acknowledgment in accordance with the Word of God!” However, Abūl-Ḥasan gestured quietly to his servants to shut the door of the house and to not let ʿAlī Muttaqī out. He apprehended this plot and slipped out as if he were flying, saying, “I am going before the Pasha who governs on behalf of the Ottoman sultan to lay this claim before him!” ‘Alī Muttaqī headed off directly toward the home of the Pasha, even though he had never before seen where that house actually was located.

On the way, he passed by his own home. He entered his cell and, falling on the bed, he slept until midnight, completely unaware of the world around him. Then he rose after midnight and called his servant asking, “Do you know anything of what happened with me this day?” The servant replied, “You yourself know better what happened.” ‘Alī Muttaqī said, “I repent of everything I have said and done—I retract it all.” Over and over he repented of God and begged forgiveness. When news of this
reached Abu’l-Hasan al-Bakri, he came running barefoot to the shaykh’s home. He thanked God that ʿAli Muttaqi had been saved from this deadly trap. He was overcome with joy that ʿAli Muttaqi was now safe.11

ʿAli Muttaqi never explained this bizarre incident of spiritual ambition, but it caused much confusion among his followers. His successor, ʿAbd al-Wahhab, glossed over the incident, refusing to acknowledge that it happened as he responded to questions from his closest disciples.

In narrating these events as presented above, ʿAbd al-Haqq also hesitated. He interrupted the narrative with many poetic couplets, which serve to deflect the reader’s attention from the spiritual claim that ʿAli Muttaqi was making toward the fact that he was in a state of uncontrollable intoxication. ʿAbd al-Haqq carefully noted that ʿAli Muttaqi had a seemingly supernatural strength during the day when he thought himself to be the Mahdi; thus, the narrator subtly framed the whole event as an example of possession by spiritual state that was both beyond ʿAli Muttaqi’s rational faculty to control and beyond his accountability to bear.12

These strange experiences, in which the states he denounced in others overwhelmed him from within himself, were ephemeral. They lasted a few hours or days, and he dismissed them as trivial. These states (Ar. ḥāwāl, singular ḥāl) neither proved his sainthood nor called it into question. In fact, these experiences only served to prove ʿAli Muttaqi’s fundamental point, that an authentic saint tempered by religious studies may experience such spiritual intoxication but will disregard it, refuse to rely on or publicize it, and eventually move beyond it.

Even in the throes of illness and uncontrollable spiritual seizures, ʿAli Muttaqi asserted his unflinching opinion that Sufi practices must be tempered by knowledge of the religious disciplines. The strange experiences of the forcible return of what he had repressed did not call his opinions into question. Rather, these experiences of trance and ecstasy showed his increasing self-confidence. Late in his life, ʿAli Muttaqi could indulge in expressions that, earlier in his life, would have shaken his emerging sense of being a saint in a reformist Sufi community. He was not afraid of being accused of what he critiqued in others, as we have seen while unpacking the previous chapter’s satchel of conflict, denunciation, and persecution. His followers excused these outbursts of elderly passion, even as they recorded them in his biography. They were already looking toward preserving his legacy as ʿAli Muttaqi approached his death, packing his spiritual baggage for the final journey beyond this world toward the furthest shore. His whole life, he had been
ʿAli Muttaqi’s Legacy

Carrying a little “death satchel” around his neck instead of the customary Sufi cloak; his satchel contained a Qur’an, a shroud, and all he needed for burial, as a constant reminder of imminent death. Now, his followers would have to carry him, bearing not just the weight of his body but also the burden of memories that they had to record on paper.

ʿAli Muttaqi died on November 4, 1567 (2 Jumādā ʾl-Awwal, AH 975), a quarter century before the advent of the new millennium that he worked so hard to downplay. He was buried at Jannat al-Muʿallā, the most prestigious cemetery in Mecca, where the Prophet’s wife, Khadija, and many of his ancestors are buried. His tomb was near that of the famous Sufi Fuḍayl ibn ʿIyāḍ (d. 803, who is included in the Chishti Order’s lineage), so it was likely destroyed along with those of the Prophet’s family when Saudi kings ordered the demolition of cemeteries in 1925.

This event reminds us how delicate legacies are, even those that appear solid and durable like a stone tomb. The shaykh’s legacy on paper was also fragile. His earliest biographies have been lost, though we know of their titles. The most authoritative biography of ʿAli Muttaqi was written by his successor, ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi, titled “Ittiḥāf al-Taqī fi Manāqib ʿAlī al-Muttaqī,” or “Gift of the God-Fearing about the Virtues of ʿAli Muttaqi.” This early record has not survived as a manuscript, though ʿAbd al-Haqq copied some narratives from it into his existing books. The second lost biography is “al-Qawl al-Naqī fi Faḍl ʿAlī Muttaqī,” or “The Pure Statement on the Excellence of ʿAlī Muttaqī” by ʿAbd al-Qadir al-Fakihi, a jurist and hadith scholar in Mecca who was a close follower. ʿAli Muttaqī’s death and the disappearance of sources about him did not dissolve his reformist project, since his successors lived on, gaining in strength and influence.

Critique: Muhammad ibn Tahir Patani in Gujarat

ʿAli Muttaqi had opposed the Mahdawi movement by writing a series of interlinked texts documented in the previous chapter. In addition to these penned polemics, he trained his disciples to carry on the work of reform and critique back in South Asia. The most renowned of these students was Shaykh Muhammad ibn Tahir Patani (d. 1578), whose career formed an extension of ʿAlī Muttaqī’s own. Muhammad ibn Tahir channeled his teacher’s textual war of words against the Mahdawi movement into a violent struggle for power. He hailed from the old Gujarati capital of Patan from a wealthy Bohra family that traded goods (mainly cloth and paper) through Gujarat’s ports. He pursued studies in the Qur’an, hadith, and law. At age fifteen, he graduated
and began to teach under the patronage of his former master, Shaykh Muthiya (also known as Mullā Mūth). Like ‘Ali Muttaqi, Muhammad ibn Tahir left Gujarat during the political turmoil of Humayun’s invasion and the subsequent collapse of the sultanate of Gujarat. He arrived in Mecca in 1537 and settled down for training in hadith studies. At first, he sat in the company of teachers who were mostly Qadiris from Yemen. Perhaps at their recommendation, he shifted to the more famous circle of hadith study under Ibn Hajar al-Haythami and Abu’l-Hasan al-Bakri.

There, he met ‘Ali Muttaqi, and chose him to be his teacher in outer learning and his master in spiritual discipline. ‘Ali Muttaqi recognized Muhammad ibn Tahir’s talent with hadith studies and cultivated him as his special follower. The biographical sources use Sufi terminology to describe this outpouring (fayḍ) of spiritual insight and personal sanctity from master to disciple. In his own writings, Muhammad ibn Tahir describes ‘Ali Muttaqi as “the most virtuous man of his times, and the greatest man in his sincere sainthood [wilaya].” This indicates that Muhammad ibn Tahir regarded him not only as his teacher but also as his Sufi master.

‘Ali Muttaqi prepared his follower to return to Gujarat as the main exponent of his program of reform there. So Muhammad ibn Tahir returned to Patan and took up teaching religious sciences at a madrasa. In accord with ‘Ali Muttaqi’s method, he would subtly teach Sufi devotion from within his lessons on hadith and jurisprudence with the slogan Dil bi yār o dast bi kār—“Keep your heart busy with God as you keep your hands busy with work.” Even as he would discourse orally to his students, his hands would be busy preparing ink and paper for his researches and copying out drafts. He spent his family fortune to recruit students from distant primary schools, asking Qur’ān teachers to send him their brightest students, to whom he gave full stipends.

In his farewell address, ‘Ali Muttaqi ordered him to remain in constant research correcting hadith reports and publishing them far and wide. In answer, Muhammad ibn Tahir composed many works on hadith and attempted to weed out weak reports from the body of generally accepted hadith.

Muhammad ibn Tahir’s erudition earned him the title Mālik al-Muḥaddithīn, “King of the Hadith Scholars,” in Gujarat. ‘Ali Muttaqi trained him as a reformer in general and specifically as an opponent of the Mahdawis. In Mecca, Muhammad ibn Tahir may have witnessed the interaction between ‘Ali Muttaqi and one of his own distant family members, a Mahdawi who had come for pilgrimage. Instead of hosting him, as was the custom, ‘Ali Muttaqi sent him a bit of money as a token of respect for their undeniable blood relation, saying he could come to ‘Ali Muttaqi’s home if he desired to “have his
beliefs set right.” The relative, evidently terrified by such treatment, never showed up. ʿAli Muttaqi outspokenly wondered whether the man would go to Medina to pay respects to the tomb of the Prophet after completing his pilgrimage to Mecca, or whether his Mahdawi allegiance to Sayyid Muhammad completely eclipsed his devotion to the Prophet.21 ʿAli Muttaqi needed an expert in hadith studies to act as his exponent in Gujarat, and Muhammad ibn Tahir did so with zeal. He had personal reasons as well as ideological reasons to oppose the Mahdawi movement, for members of his Bohra community were joining the Mahdawis.22 He critiqued the Mahdawis through the study of hadith reports, opening a new front in this textual war.

Muhammad ibn Tahir excelled in documenting forged and false hadith reports that had circulated since the second or third Islamic century, even those that had become popularly respected as the Prophet Muhammad’s own words. His book on inauthentic hadith reports included a whole chapter on the Mahdi, declaring invalid many of the reports upon which numbers of Muslims, including the Mahdawis, based their speculations. He judged the famous report “God sends to the Islamic community at the inception of each new century a leader who will revive and renew the community’s religion” to be falsely ascribed to the Prophet and baseless. He noted, “Many people believe that the reviver [mujaddid] of the tenth century will be the Mahdi or Jesus, and nowadays every sect claims that its own leader is the Mahdi, but God knows the truth that the Mahdi must be accepted by all the scholars and authorities in general [and cannot be some sectarian figure].”23 He further judged that another hadith was forged, one that the Mahdawis used to highlight that Sayyid Muhammad was a juridical authority above the established legal methods and their founders: “There will be at the end of time a man who is my follower and vice-regent [khalifa] who surpasses even Abū Bakr and ʿUmar.”24 ʿAli Muttaqi had tried to prove that the Mahdawis did not follow authentic hadith reports in their totality; Muhammad ibn Tahir attempted to show that they based their doctrines on unreliable and invalid individual hadith reports.

Muhammad ibn Tahir likely served as the channel through whom ʿAli Muttaqi’s anti-Mahdawi treatises were copied and circulated. In addition, historical sources record Muhammad ibn Tahir’s own activities in critique of the Mahdawis.

He used to openly contradict their [Mahdawis’] doctrinal beliefs while engaging them in disputations and debates, urging them to recant their doctrines and give up their misguided beliefs and hypocritical
dissimulation. This was his constant project, and he prevailed through many conflicts with them and defeated them in debates in many large gatherings, exposing their disgraceful actions and baseless tales. He proved their doctrines to be void and refuted what they held up as proof, revealing it as invalid. He went to extremes to denounce them and warned them of punishment if they persisted. He accused them of infidelity and having stepped outside the boundaries of Islam. He wanted to uproot this heresy from its very source, striving with all possible means.  

Mahdawi sources blame “the scholars of Patan” for their partisan opposition, without naming Muhammad ibn Tahir. Scholars from Patan had raised the stakes of the conflict to violent heights by requesting legal decisions from Mecca to justify executing Mahdawis as heretics. This was at a time of increasing Mahdawi activity, as the government of Gujarat weakened with the assassination of Sultan Mahmud Shah III. Court intrigue and open conflict between nobles meant that Mahdawis were no longer the object of state persecution and were freer to openly proselytize.

Muhammad ibn Tahir wrote “Naṣīḥat al-Wulāt,” or “Advice to the Rulers,” warning of the need to suppress the Mahdawi movement and sent it to Shēr Khān Fulādī, the governor of Patan (and possibly to the governors of other Gujarati cities as well). Under his influence, the governor of Patan reportedly took action against the Mahdawis. However, Muhammad ibn Tahir did not have such success when he traveled to the capital. He found the political situation chaotic under the last sultan of Gujarat, the pretender Muẓaffar Shah III (ruled nominally 1561–73). The regent, Iʿtimad Khan, controlled the sultan while other nobles vied for influence. As this power struggle verged toward civil war, the Mahdawis gained political leverage. In the capital, Muhammad ibn Tahir was attacked by a Mahdawi partisan who wounded him with a sword, and he returned to Patan in frustration. There is further evidence that the Mahdawis openly exercised power in the capital. When ‘Ali Muttaqi’s successor, ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi, returned to Ahmedabad in 1567 (just after ‘Ali Muttaqi’s death) to visit his family, a group of Mahdawis overran his home with the intent to kill him. He escaped by climbing over the compound wall and fleeing the city, returning quickly to Mecca.  

This situation caused Muhammad ibn Tahir to adopt a new political strategy. His teacher, ‘Ali Muttaqi, supported the Muzaffar-Shahi dynasty and pinned his hopes of reform in Gujarat upon its strength, seeing the Mughals as the main threat to this program. However, by the time Muhammad ibn Tahir returned to Gujarat, the sultanate was weak and its nobles had
conceded precious ports to the Portuguese in exchange for help against their political rivals. After the Mughal ruler Akbar consolidated power, he conquered Gujarat in 1573. Muhammad ibn Tahir took this opportunity to ally with the Mughals, in hope that Akbar’s invasion might be leveraged to assert his program of reform.

When Akbar’s armies crossed into Gujarat, they first conquered the northern city of Patan before moving south to take the port of Surat and then the capital at Ahmedabad. At Patan, Islamic scholars and Sufis pledged allegiance to Mughal rule, followed quickly by scholars at Ahmedabad and Khambhat. When the Mughal army camped at Patan, Muhammad ibn Tahir met Akbar and informed him that Mahdawis posed a grave threat to religious rectitude and social stability. He urged Akbar to suppress them. Most likely, the emperor answered him in the affirmative and promised to pursue this course of action, for at this early stage in his career, Akbar justified his rule with reference to upholding the shariʿa. He had not yet decided to humble Islamic scholars and elevate his own personality to the status of a divinely enlightened ruler who was independent of juridical authority. As an invader, Akbar would have relied for legitimacy and recognition upon scholars and saints in the area he conquered. Rumors abounded that Akbar was poised to attack the Mahdawi daʾiras in Gujarat and drive them out of the province. The Mahdawis prepared for the assault; however, it never came.

Akbar was personally uninterested in persecuting Mahdawis. One of his court scholars, Shaykh Mubārak Nāgōrī (d. 1593), had Mahdawi sympathies, and Akbar grew to rely on his brilliant sons Abūʾil-Faḍl and Fayḍī (a philosopher and a poet, respectively, who grew up liberally beyond strict Mahdawi loyalties) as his leading courtiers. However, in 1573 Akbar appointed his foster-brother, MirzāʾAziz Kōkā (d. 1624), to be governor of Gujarat. Later that year, the governor executed the policies urged by Muhammad ibn Tahir and ordered a military attack against the daʾira at Mōrbī, which Miyan Mustafa’s father had founded; the father was killed in the assault along with many of his followers, while the son, Miyan Mustafa Gujarati, was arrested and taken captive to Ahmedabad.²⁸ Akbar did make a show of “upholding orthodoxy,” as he called Miyan Mustafa, the most erudite Mahdawi in the locale of Patan, to justify his Mahdawi beliefs.²⁹ After questioning in court, he was released without punishment.

Muhammad ibn Tahir’s political strategy seemed to work while Mirza ʿAziz Koka governed Gujarat from 1573 till 1579. Mahdawis were driven into hiding, and “most of the traces of this heretical innovation were wiped out.”³⁰ However, the position of governor under Mughal rule rotated regularly. Within a
few years, the position was given to ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Khān-e Khānān (d. 1627, the son of Akbar’s former regent, the Shiʿi general Bayrām Khān). Under ʿAbd al-Raḥīm’s governorship, the Mahdawis increased in visibility. One chronicler accused the new governor of “offering the Mahdawis protection,” while others alleged that he “was in league with the heretical innovators” and actively encouraged their activities. Since he came from a Shiʿi family, the new governor probably advocated the protection of minority communities. Muhammad ibn Tahir decided to petition Akbar to replace the governor. But while traveling to Agra to meet Akbar in 1578, a band of “heretical extremists” assassinated him on the road between Ujjain and Sarangpur (Sārangpūr, both towns in Malwa).

The assassination of Muhammad ibn Tahir lends credence to ‘Ali Muttaqi’s accusation that the Mahdawis and Shattaris were allied. Wajih al-Dīn ʿAlawi, the primary successor to Muhammad Ghawth in Gujarat, provides dramatic evidence that some Shattari masters allied with the Mahdawis. When Muhammad ibn Tahir came from Patan to Ahmedabad, Wajih al-Dīn tried to dissuade him from confronting the Mahdawis; the Shattari master delivered to him a subtle discourse on ultimate reality.

My dear brother, the true saint recognizes the world’s nature. The world was created in an orderly arrangement and everything has its purpose; this is so that all the names of God can manifest in the world, both the beauteous names and the mighty names. On the order of your Lord, each name manifests itself and in its particular form with its own effects and powers. The real meaning of the “straight path” [ṣirāt-e mustaqīm] is that each being expresses its own nature as a manifestation of the divine names. All appearances of contradiction and deviation are only manifestations of the divine names as they manifest here in the world. From this point of view, every Moses should come to some sort of peaceful reconciliation with his Pharaoh. Therefore, my dear brother, there is no need for this political maneuvering and crafty showmanship! Stay engrossed in God and don’t meddle in what other people are doing! These are times to keep silent and stay at home.

Wajih al-Dīn insisted that the true saint should perceive no enemies, for conflict and contradiction are only illusory appearances in the world that belie an underlying unity. To oppose others with force is to give in to worldly illusion and lose grasp of the divine unity that sustains everyone, the seemingly orthodox as well as the apparently heretical. Wajih al-Dīn made this
philosophical argument for ethical relativism, which he saw as the essential principle of Islamic spirituality that seeks to apprehend divine unity.

Muhammad ibn Tahir, however, did not buy the argument. He continued to oppose the Mahdawis, raising the stakes by pledging to take his case to Akbar. The famous biographer of Sufis, Muḥammad Ghawthī Shaṭṭārī, judges that Muhammad ibn Tahir disregarded this advice because he was “too engrossed in political partisanship.” But Ghawthi himself was subtly partisan: he was a student and disciple of Wajih al-Din. It was not political hardheadedness that led Muhammad ibn Tahir to disregard it but rather his commitment to ‘Ali Muttaki’s ideal of reformed Sufi training that would revive the shariʿa. Such a revival necessitated limitation of “authentic sainthood” and strong critique of those judged to have transgressed its borders. On principle, he could not accept Wajih al-Din’s proposed truce. Even if he believed that the universe was really nothing but the manifestation of the divine names, he did not accept the proposal that insight about the oneness of being could form the authentic basis for Islamic social ethics. Rather, he argued that social ethics must be based on the behavior of the Prophet Muhammad, as focused into definite legal boundaries.

Wajih al-Din was the pivotal figure who defused reform efforts of the Muttaki community by presenting them as unjustified persecutions, as we observed in the fourth satchel. In response to the persecution of Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth, Wajih al-Din wrote a scholarly treatise against the practice of declaring others to be non-Muslims and liable to state punishment (takfir). He used juridical terms and hadith reports to justify his argument, claiming that what Sufis or saints pronounce in a state of spiritual intoxication (sukr) should not make them liable for censure or punishment. Specifically, he defended certain statements in Muhammad Ghawth’s ascension narrative against censure, concluding that “nobody who recites the attestation to faith [kalima] and turns toward Mecca for prayer [qibla] should be called an infidel or unbeliever.”

Wajih al-Din presented the same argument to protect Mahdawis from persecution. When a fatwa circulated in Gujarat declaring the Mahdawis to be unbelievers and liable to be executed, some scholars in Ahmedabad pressed Wajih al-Din to sign it. He refused and denounced their efforts, repeating his mantra that nobody who recites the attestation to faith should be called an infidel. Even if someone does just one thing in accord with the shariʿa, he should always be protected as a Muslim. Wajih al-Din appeared to be trying to save Muhammad ibn Tahir’s life by urging him to quit critiquing the Mahdawis;
however, he profited by Muhammad ibn Tahir’s demise, for he was left as the leading hadith scholar of Gujarat. Muhammad ibn Tahir was killed while on the road to Agra to petition Akbar. He assumed that the Mughal emperor would act upon his advice to champion Sunni Islam and would trust hadith scholars and jurists, like himself, to define what were the bounds of orthodoxy. He expected that the Mughal emperor would behave like the sultans of Gujarat, who periodically acted upon the advice and rulings of ‘Ali Muttaqi to suppress the Mahdawis and others who were perceived to threaten Sunni orthodoxy. When Akbar was younger, this assumption might have held. He came to the throne at age twelve but ruled under a regent, Bayram Khan (d. 1561), a Shi‘i Turkoman from Iran and able general who loyally supported Humayun and secured him aid from the Safavid ruler of Iran, Shah Tahmasp, to survive exile and reconquer South Asia. Akbar grew up under Bayram Khan’s care and considered him a stepfather, passing all governing authority to him.

By the age of eighteen, however, Akbar began to chafe at the regency. After a military confrontation, Akbar dictated that Bayram Khan should leave South Asia to make the Hajj. The deposed regent traveled with his family toward the ports of Gujarat to secure the sea passage, but upon reaching the city of Patan he was assassinated. Mughal sources blame his death on an Afghan soldier who wanted revenge for a military defeat he had suffered when Bayram Khan secured Mughal rule. However, it is telling that Akbar did not send a detachment of guards to protect the family on their long journey.

For a period after Bayram Khan’s death, Akbar ruled as a typical Sunni ruler, paying homage to Sufis and allowing religious scholars at court to determine shari‘a rulings. Akbar drew close to Chishti saints, both living and dead, whose patronage shored up his legitimacy in the public eye and whose blessings facilitated the birth of his sons. He instituted a yearly pilgrimage to the dargah of Khwaja Mu’in al-Din Chishti, who was perceived to be the guarantor over South Asia’s sovereignty.

As Akbar successful conquered Gujarat and Bengal, both coastal regions with ports rich in trade and industry, he increasingly centralized power. He promoted himself as a divinely appointed, just ruler and began to undermine the authority of traditional scholars. Even if Muhammad ibn Tahir had survived to get an audience with Akbar, his petition would likely have fallen on deaf ears. One year after Muhammad ibn Tahir was killed, in 1579, Akbar circulated the document known as the maḥḍar; it called upon religious scholars and many Sufi leaders to affirm with their signatures that “a just ruler is more
favored by God than a paradigmatic jurist [mujtahid],” which would place the emperor above even the founders of the four Sunni legal schools as well as any later jurist who upheld them.36

Akbar forced religious authorities in his realm, which now included Gujarat, to sign away their power to give or withhold legitimacy over his rule. Many scholars and jurists who previously wielded power and prestige in court were subsequently denounced, humiliated, and exiled. Even before this formal declaration, Akbar distanced himself from living Sufi masters and in compensation exaggerated his devotion to the long-dead saint Mu’in al-Din Chishti. The Shattari Sufis also lost the influence they once enjoyed. When Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth returned to Gwalior from his years of exile in Gujarat, Akbar did not invite him to court. Akbar refused to take initiation with Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth, as his father Humayun had done. After a few years, Muhammad Ghawth requested an audience with Akbar at court, and the chief court scholar roused some powerful nobles to ridicule him about his ascension experience and threatened him with persecution.37 Yet when Muhammad Ghawth died in Gwalior, Akbar had a grand mausoleum built for him: it was the first Mughal-built dargah and the first to use jali (carved lattice of stone), a technique common in dargahs during the sultanate of Gujarat, which became increasingly incorporated into the Mughal architectural style.

When the young Mughal dynasty was struggling to win ascendancy, its survival depended on gaining popular recognition through alliances with Sufis like Muhammad Ghawth and other Shattaris. But by the time Akbar ruled as a mature emperor, administration was strong, authority was centralized, and relentless conquest enriched his coffers. He ceased to depend upon Sufis or scholars to convey legitimacy and consolidate sovereignty. Rather, he began to elevate his own authority and rein in their power with his innovated concept of “sacred kingship,” in which the just ruler drew on higher inspiration than Sufis or scholars. Some historians, like Azfar Moin, misread Akbar’s religious innovation and assert that the ruler was claiming “sainthood” for himself. Others correct this misreading, such as Corrine Lefevre, who observes that Akbar elevated reason and millennial election, forces that made him, the divinely illumined emperor, more just and authoritative than jurists, scholars, or saints.38 There are different modes of sacred power in the Islamic tradition, but sainthood should not be used as an umbrella term to cover all of them. Akbar articulated “sacred kingship,” but this does not mean he claimed to be a saint or referred to himself as the Mahdi. His claim to absolute political authority based on divine appointment signaled the maturation of a new
imperium at the advent of the new millennium. This was the environment in which the next phase of ‘Ali Muttaqi’s legacy took shape, embodied in ‘Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi.\textsuperscript{39}

**Rebuilding: ‘Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi**

When Gujarat was absorbed as a Mughal province, ‘Ali Muttaqi’s reform project seemed overturned in South Asia. ‘Ali Muttaqi’s primary Sufi successor, ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi, had tried to return but was attacked by Mahdawi partisans and fled Gujarat for good. His primary hadith student, Muhammad ibn Tahir, had returned from Mecca to Gujarat but was assassinated. For a decade after Muhammad ibn Tahir’s death, his colleague ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi stayed in Mecca, quietly tending the foundation of training Sufi hadith scholars while keeping aloof from South Asian politics. Then ‘Abd al-Haqq Muhaddith Dihlawi arrived in Mecca a few years before the millennium. ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi carefully cultivated him to take this foundation back to Delhi and rebuild their reform project in the heart of the Mughal Empire.\textsuperscript{40}

‘Abd al-Haqq is mentioned often in this book as a biographer of ‘Ali Muttaqi and his followers. Yet he was also famous as a hadith scholar and is often credited with reviving Islamic scholarship in South Asia. In his mature years in Delhi (for forty years, until his death in 1642), he articulated this revival with the aim of social reform to gently undermine some of the Mughal cultural synthesis and religious experimentation of Akbar’s reign. His moderate approach sought to avoid extreme rhetoric and the ideological stridency of movements like the Mahdawis or the Naqshbandis led by Ahmad Sirhindi.

‘Abd al-Haqq’s endeavor to reform society, through revival of the study of scriptural sciences and moderation of Sufi practice, matured after training in Mecca under Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi.

The memory of ‘Abd al-Haqq is best preserved for modern audiences by Khaliq Ahmad Nizami, his biographer in Urdu. Nizami describes ‘Abd al-Haqq as the reviver of the *shari‘a* at the height of the Mughal Empire, emphasizing his role over and against the more popularly acknowledged revivalist, Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi. Despite Nizami’s heroic portrait, ‘Abd al-Haqq’s journey to becoming a profound and prolific Sufi scholar was full of dead ends, disasters, and disappointments. It was no foregone conclusion that he would become a reformist Sufi and politically influential scholar. As a young man, ‘Abd al-Haqq left Delhi to make the Hajj; in the process, he tarried in Gujarat and studied in Mecca, transforming his approach to both *shari‘a* and Sufism. His
pilgrimage sojourn lasted only three years, but its impact on his life was immeasurable because it gave him the chance to join the Muttaqi community.

ʿAbd al-Haqq began his Sufi training under his father, Shaykh Sayf al-Din.41 His father was famous in Delhi as a poet who expressed mystical themes of self-oblation through immersion in the divine presence. Sayf al-Din initiated his son into the Qadiri Order in 1559, when he was only nine years old. His early Sufi orientation was ecstatic and philosophical, emphasizing poetic eloquence and passionate longing over scholarly acumen. In old age, ʿAbd al-Haqq’s father ordered him to take initiation from another Qadiri preceptor, Shaykh Mūsā Jīlānī, whom he met in 1577 when ʿAbd al-Haqq was twenty-seven years old and already an accomplished scholar.42 His Qadiri training focused on immersion in love mysticism with the goal of subverting the bonds of reason and freeing the heart.43 ʿAbd al-Haqq writes of his life during that time:

I was engaged, night and day, in trying to gain the great profit of divine union. Sometimes I would stay awake for many nights so that a flash of that divine beauty might light up my consciousness. Sometimes I would spend many days as if in a dream of my imagination so that I might find some sign of divine union.

If you promise to meet me while I am awake
    then I forbid myself from sleeping even a peep
If you reveal a glimmer of your beauty in my dreams
    till judgment day I won’t lift my head from sleep

I remained in this practice until the obstructing veil of my reason and the desire for self-knowledge were lifted from me. This act was the result of divine blessing and generosity alone, that raised me up, helpless in myself, and brought me to the threshold of God’s House [the Ka’ba in Mecca].44

ʿAbd al-Haqq saw his second initiation as an intensification of the first with his father. His father was a Qadiri Sufi, but Shaykh Musa was a direct descendant of ʿAbd al-Qadir Jilani, the founder of the order. ʿAbd al-Haqq praised him as the physical embodiment of ʿAbd al-Qadir and reported that “Shaykh Musa loved me to the furthest extent possible and accepted me as his son, and gave me leave to be his vice-regent.”45 Under his care, ʿAbd al-Haqq experienced ecstasy, alienation from his ego, and longing for union with divine beauty by breaking the bonds of his reason. These were all standard stages
of love mysticism, which did not erase allegiance to shariʿa norms but also did not normally lead to reification of shariʿa through revivalist strategies. In ʿAbd al-Haqq’s early life under Qadiri preceptors, scholarly discipline and mystical devotion had their own spheres of activity and their own religious legitimacy.

After his second initiation, ʿAbd al-Haqq stayed in Delhi for some time, for he was thirty-two years old and married with children. Shortly after his father died in 1582, ʿAbd al-Haqq moved to Fatehpur Sikri, the new Mughal palace-city a short distance from Agra, where his new shaykh, Musa Jilani, had connections in Akbar’s court. Shaykh Musa had sought Akbar’s aid in a conflict of succession, and Akbar persuaded him to settle at Fatehpur Sikri with a noble rank. Shaykh Musa introduced ʿAbd al-Haqq to court as an educated gentleman, budding scholar, and avid poet; he befriended leading personalities there like Faydi (the court poet, d. 1595), ʿAbd al-Qadir Badaʿuni (a court historian, d. 1605) and Nīzām al-Dīn Aḥmad Bakhshī (a high administrator and historian, d. 1621).

ʿAbd al-Haqq came to Fatehpur Sikri seeking royal patronage or a teaching position. He may have spent five years there, but, unlike his Sufi master, ʿAbd al-Haqq could not turn the Mughal court to his own advantage. In Akhbaru al-Akhyār, ʿAbd al-Haqq makes elliptical and literary references to this period, as if he were scarred by his experience. He uses deliberately double-sided expressions that could describe both his Sufi exercises and his liminal social status. “I was sitting in isolation, separated from home and relatives. My heart bore great hopes, yet I neither performed favors for others nor harmed them. I never allowed the dust of other’s footsteps to settle on my heart. My conscience was clear of the need to keep the company of this particular person or that person; no, even more than this I had grown tired of mentioning the names Zayd and ʿUmar from grammar lessons and books of composition.”

When ʿAbd al-Haqq claims that his conscience was “clear of the need” to sit with this person or that person, he unintentionally reveals that he was both tempted and compelled to find patronage, support, and allies at court. Courtiers vied with each other over who could claim this brilliant young scholar in their circle of debate, discussion, plotting, and planning. This is the direction pointed out by the metaphor of “Zayd and ʿUmar,” who are the stock characters of classical Arabic grammar exercises (like “Jack and John” in English). “Zayd and ʿUmar” could be a cipher for the two leading personalities at court, the brothers Abuʾl-Fadl and Faydi, the ideologues responsible for promoting Akbar as a universal and enlightened monarch who was above the conventional shariʿa. ʿAbd al-Haqq was engaged as a teacher of Arabic as well
as religious sciences in court circles, so that even common lessons involving “Zayd and ‘Umar” entangled him in exhausting court intrigues.

‘Abd al-Haqq mentions that he had turned to the council of others and relied on their guidance during this time, a move that gave way in his conscience to temptation, doubts, and even moments of disbelief.

I am made joyful by those times, like in my youth and my student days, when I pass through the straits and snares which cause the foot to slip and the eyes to stray. In those times, divine help extended from beyond the veil of the unseen from that place I know, so that the overwhelming power of God leads me, without my own choosing, from the doubts and weak misgivings that are dropped into the workshop of the ego and the tempter, and leads me to sit in the tranquil haven of alienation and aloneness. By these means, the Lord turned my seeking aid from others into another direction, toward seeking the Lord alone. For a time, due to the rebellion of my reason and the turbidity of my vain ambition, I did not even have that basic belief in divine unity that is the primary condition for any Sufi seeker. My heart was not inscribed with the desired orientation toward sincerity and righteousness. In the end, after no good came from taking council with other people and following their advice, there remained no way out for me except to pass the reins of choice back to the true One. Since my reason could not untie the knots that held me down, there was no way forward except through letting go of reason and embracing a holy madness.

You must leave aside calculated rationality and lay hold of what seems like insanity.\(^{19}\)

In this delicately phrased text, ‘Abd a-Haqq does not accuse others of disbelief and heresy at court but rather confesses that he himself was found guilty of disbelief, for he turned to others for material aid and social advancement rather than relying on God alone.

An “unofficial” autobiographical fragment that ‘Abd al-Haqq included in one of his later letters sheds light on his experience at court. He found a modicum of success at court, for the emperor Akbar raised his position and provided for his material needs. However, success led only to dissatisfaction: he suspected that various factions at court sought to manipulate him and use his fame to increase their own power and achieve their own designs. In this letter, written by ‘Abd al-Haqq just after he returned to Delhi from Mecca, he reveals some candid details of his experience at court.
I am a man who grew up since my youngest days accustomed to exertions of learning and worship. I never got accustomed to the company of worldly people and the demands of socializing with them. Once I had acquired, by the grace of God, reasonable experience with socializing and satisfied my needs and aims by engaging with society, some powerful people in the government prevailed upon me to present myself for service before the worldly rules. I met the sultan of the age [Akbar] and he provided for me, took care of my needs, and raised my position. They sought to increase their following through using me and to gain command of wealth and power through manipulating me, but God protected me and did not leave me to their designs. God evoked in the heart of his servant an overwhelming attraction and passion for God and led him out of India to this holy place [Mecca].

The historian Bada’uni claimed that ʿAbd al-Haqq left court in protest against the emperor’s heretical experiments. Yet in reality, Akbar’s new policies were in place before ʿAbd al-Haqq came to court: the maḥḍar was decreed that Akbar’s judgment was more authoritative than that of Muslim jurists, and a forum for debates among scholars of differing sects and religions (ʿibādat-khāna) was established. Why would ʿAbd al-Haqq take a position teaching at court in 1582 if he saw these ongoing innovations as heretical? In 1584, while still at court, he began to compile his first major work, Akhbār al-Akhyār, yet this hagiography offers no evidence of disgust at contemporary heresies in South Asia.

ʿAbd al-Haqq became a reformist Sufi dedicated to reviving the shariʿa only after meeting Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi in Mecca. ʿAbd al-Haqq was not disgusted by others at court, only at himself for having come there. He was perplexed not by the spread of heresy but by his own worldly ambition to gain fame as a religious scholar. In the intense internal reaction that overwhelmed him, he abandoned the court, his teaching position, and even all pretense of being a Sufi master. This was a precarious passage, even a dangerous one. Throughout his early life, ʿAbd al-Haqq’s loyalty to the ideals of Sufism and its practice did not conflict with his aspiration to become a scholar and teacher. As he began to teach, attain renown, and accrue symbolic capital, he experienced an internal backlash; he questioned all that he was engaged in, including his pursuit of knowledge.

ʿAbd al-Haqq justified his devastating internal critique and subsequent renunciation as the effect of jadhba, overpowering attraction to God that draws one out of one’s own reason. Its manifestations were only shades different
from the signs of insanity. Hisbout of “holy madness” was a socially accept-
able means to escape from the Mughal court. ʿAbd al-Haqq left Fatehpur Sikri
and claims to have wandered, disregarding work and human contact, until
he ended up in Mecca.

After I found some peace of mind and the agitation of doubts and tempta-
tions subsided, doubts which ultimately cause disappointment and de-
spair, then I ceased to struggle with any kind of work and shut my eyes
to the presence of others around me. I sat on the threshold of my own
heart, waiting to see what might happen and what door might open be-
fore me. Under the ruling of the phrase “Those who allow God to act on
their behalf will never be disappointed and those who turn to God in tri-
als will find release,” the empowerer of the helpless and the guide of the
wandering called me toward the divine presence. God placed the chain
of longing and love around the neck of this homeless wanderer, and
pulled him toward his own abode. And this undeserving one reached
that most sought after goal, the place of the beloved, Mecca and Medina.52

Despite what he says, ʿAbd al-Haqq did not go directly to Mecca; he did not
have the material means to go and his journey meandered.

In his state of jadhba he wandered to Delhi, where his family had remained
when he moved to court. As he renounced all ambitions at court, ʿAbd al-Haqq
also renounced the model of Shaykh Musa, who was still alive. He regressed
to the more comforting model of his first Sufi master, his dead father; he ex-
plained his renunciation as his faithfully upholding his father’s advice and
embodying the very spirit of his guidance. “From my very earliest days, I have
observed the advice of my father, who used to tell me, ʿBe careful that you
don’t become a dry and hard-hearted scholar [mullā].’ Thus, every breath that
I draw in love and passion increases my tenderheartedness, and each step I
take is on the path of distancing my need from others and evoking sympathy
to their needs from myself. . . . I am hopeful that with each breath, I can follow
his footsteps and that I succeed in the real task of desisting from the business
of the self.”53 ʿAbd al-Haqq sorely missed the warm and sheltered atmosphere
of his father’s circle in Delhi, so he drifted back there with vague hopes of
rediscovering this lost equipoise.

Yet when it was not to be found, the last strands of reason beyond the cords
of ambition snapped: his state of jadhba reached its fullest extent. This “mad-
ness” allowed him to leave his family and children behind and to wander
to Gujarat without funds to get to Mecca. He had fallen into the perplexed
state we may call a “nervous breakdown” or “midlife crisis.” The advice of
colleagues and plans of his reason led him to a dead end; only the waves of insane attraction to God could carry him on a sojourn to the other side. ‘Abd al-Haqq roamed overland from Delhi to Gujarat for one year, heading toward the port of Surat that commanded the overseas routes to Arabia.

How did ‘Abd al-Haqq travel in his state of “madness” and without funds? He found in the Shattari Order a powerful network that connected inland Delhi to the Gujarati coasts, for Shaykh Muhammad Ghawth had survived persecution and, over the next sixteen years, built a strong following in Gujarat. As ‘Abd al-Haqq traveled to Gujarat, he found himself supported by Shattari Sufis in this network. In Mandu, he stayed with the Sufi biographer Muhammad Ghawthi Shattari. In Ahmedabad, he kept company with Shaykh Wajih al-Din ‘Alawi. Furthermore, ‘Abd al-Haqq enjoyed support from Mughal nobility and administrators in his travels. In Malwa, he was hosted by the Mughal governor, Mirza Aziz Koka. In Ahmedabad, he was welcomed by Nizam al-Din Ahmad Bakhshi, the Sufi-minded and philosophical noble who was provincial treasurer and prior acquaintance from the Mughal court. His good relations with Shattari Sufis further demonstrate that ‘Abd al-Haqq did not advocate a reformist agenda at this stage in his life; his friendship with Mughal officials shows that he was not protesting Akbar’s policies.

His powerful friend Nizam al-Din Ahmad Bakhshi secured for ‘Abd al-Haqq a sea passage to Mecca. By then, the sailing season to Arabia had already ended, and he had to wait for up to ten months for seasonal winds to change. He waited in Ahmedabad, spending time with Wajih al-Din, from whom he learned Qadiri litanies and prayers. By acquiring dhikr techniques from him, ‘Abd al-Haqq treated him as a shaykh al-istiрафa, a Sufi master who granted him litanies and techniques without giving him initiation as a disciple. If ‘Abd al-Haqq were searching for a new Sufi initiation to provide him with a new foundation and allow him to rebuild his life, Wajih al-Din would be a choice dear to his heart; this Gujarati shaykh compounded an outer shari‘a rectitude and acumen in the discipline of hadith with an inner attachment to ecstatic experience and existential philosophy. At this point in his life, ‘Abd al-Haqq did not consider philosophy to be an obstacle to authentic Islamic piety, nor did he view hadith studies as a method of tempering the speculative, poetic, and musical currents of Sufi devotion. If he had taken a new Sufi master in Gujarat from among the Qadiri and Shattari networks that he traveled through, then he might never have evolved into a reformist Sufi and reviver of shari‘a disciplines.

Many Sufis who made the Hajj and stayed in Mecca for intense scholarly training never became reformers. Many, even after extended residence in
Arabia, never wavered in their devotion to existential philosophy as the primary intellectual and aesthetic articulation of Sufi practice. ʿAbd al-Haqq’s reformist ideas, therefore, cannot be explained simply by his going on the Hajj and staying three years in Mecca. His reformist ideas developed because there he met Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi, who combined initiation and scholarly training in a unique way.

Initiation into the triple tariqa opened a devotional and ideological world for ʿAbd al-Haqq that was much wider than the options he had explored in South Asia. Examining the content of this teaching—how it both challenged and disciplined him—makes clear that ʿAbd al-Haqq became a reformer and revivalist because he was first and foremost an interregional, multilingual Sufi scholar, which attracted him to the Muttaqi method. His connection with ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi allowed ʿAbd al-Haqq to return to Delhi, reoriented and strengthened to build his mature career. Indeed, it forced him to do so against his will.

At first, ʿAbd al-Haqq had intended only to find hadith experts in Mecca and to master their scholarly discipline. Yet, in hindsight, he records that he also harbored an unarticulated hope of finding another Sufi guide.

After I came to Mecca and Medina, I fulfilled my primary goal: I was blessed by visiting the tomb of the Prophet, witnessing the beauty of the Kaʿba, and performing the rites of the Hajj. These are the peak experiences of anyone’s life! But I also had a secondary goal, which was to study the hadith of the Prophet, which brings one closer to his spirit, in the very place where he had lived. Here I might mention a further blessing, the realization of which was completely outside of my planning or control—that was to find one of the special people who dwell here in Mecca, who are so intimate to the Prophet in their own souls. I could barely hope that I might meet one such as this, so that he might perceive my plight or my eyes might be illuminated by the sight of him, for either event would be a great bliss. If I might get the chance to speak with one such as this or serve him, this would be the key to attain salvation that would lay the foundation upon which I could build my whole life in the future. Sufi masters say that one hour of sitting with love and affection in the presence of one who has reached the ultimate goal and one who is chosen by the Prophet, that single hour would be the apex of one’s whole life. . . . And if I could stay in his company and training for an extended time so that [absorbing the illumination of his sainthood] could reach its full effect, filling me with the reflection of the brilliant
manifestations of divine beauty and keeping my gaze from straying to the multiplicity of the created world, then this would indeed fulfill the promise of the Qurʾan: light upon light, God guides to the light whomever God wills [Qurʾan 24:35]. For many years, a prayer has been on my tongue and in my heart, to ask for just this. As Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qadir Jilani has instructed, I prayed, “Oh Lord, guide me to one from among those who are intimate with you, who may guide me to your presence and may teach me the way to reach you.”

As he explained, ʿAbd al-Haqq first performed the pilgrimage and then studied in Mecca with some unspecified masters of hadith. Through them, he met ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi. Toward the end of his first year in Mecca, he began to study the hadith collection titled “The Niche for Lamps” (Mishkāt al-Maṣābiḥ) under the tutelage of ʿAbd al-Wahhab. ʿAbd al-Haqq may not have recognized ʿAbd al-Wahhab as a Sufi master, for it was his method to simply teach what each student came to learn from him. Only slowly did the shaykh focus his inner attention upon the soul of the student and subtly achieve spiritual direction as well, rather than demanding up-front allegiance with dramatic rituals of renunciation and submission.

Within a year, ʿAbd al-Haqq recognized him as the spiritual guide for whom he had been secretly longing and became a disciple (murīd). ʿAbd al-Haqq’s record of his interaction with his new shaykh shows that he was extremely willful, assertive, and questioning with his master, in contrast to ʿAbd al-Wahhab’s almost complete self-abnegation under ʿAli Muttaqi. Despite this, ʿAbd al-Wahhab carefully cultivated ʿAbd al-Haqq to return to Delhi to spread the Muttaqi reform project. This was against ʿAbd al-Haqq’s own will and natural inclination. This initiation was going to be a monumental challenge for ʿAbd al-Haqq, from the very first moment that he requested formal initiation.

I told Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhab, “When I arrived in the Hijaz and was made joyful after visiting the tomb of the Prophet, then I came into your circle of students and followers and was ennobled with your company. There appeared in my heart a little of the light of faith that refuted whatever might have remained in my heart of greed for worldly gain and hopes of attaining worldly recognition. Now, I desire only to course the path that you teach along with your followers and enter into the company of the spiritual seekers who are devoted to you.” The shaykh remained silent for a while with his head bowed. Then he raised his head and said, “Praise be to God! Nothing could be better than that one choose to halt the natural course of his life and commit himself to sitting in the corner of
isolation and anonymity, for this is the highest level of achieving divine acceptance.” Then he added, “Following my path is a very difficult task! Attaining firm footing in it takes long struggle. The basic principle is that you must participate in the lives of others and mix with them constantly, sharing with them in what is good and avoiding in them what is evil.”

How striking this challenge must have been. ‘Abd al-Haqq had just finished baring his heart to ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi by admitting that before his experience at court, he “never had socialized with people and thus suffered despair at their hands.” Then his master replied that he would not be allowed to stay in Mecca and Medina, leading a simple and scholarly life in detachment from the political and social confusion back home.

For over two years, ‘Abd al-Wahhab challenged ‘Abd al-Haqq and cleverly diverted him from his intellectual and ideological inclinations. For example, consider how he wavered in choosing a legal school to follow. Like most South Asian Muslims, ‘Abd al-Haqq was raised with the Hanafi legal school. In sailing to Mecca, he passed beyond the zone where the Hanafi legal school predominated and entered a zone of Shafi‘i dominance. In most coastal regions around the Indian Ocean, Muslims follow the Shafi‘i school. Hanafi visitors to Mecca found themselves to be often beset by zealous Shafi‘is who were convinced that their own legal method was the purest and most elegant; they accused others, especially the Hanafis, of basing their decisions on personal opinion (ẓann) and reasonable speculation (rā‘ī) rather than on that squarely proven by the Prophetic hadith.

‘Abd al-Haqq was initially convinced by these arguments. As a hadith scholar, he was eager to follow a juridical method that ideologically based itself on Prophetic reports, and most of the great hadith scholars in Mecca were Shafi‘is from Egypt. But when ‘Abd al-Haqq admitted to ‘Abd al-Wahhab that he wanted to change allegiance to the Shafi‘i school, the shaykh defended the Hanafi school and its founder, Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767). ‘Abd al-Wahhab claimed that although the Shafi‘is were ideologically articulate in stressing the importance of hadith in legal reasoning, the Hanafis actually made more important contributions to hadith literature than did the Shafi‘is. Since the Hanafi school organized first, its books contain the earliest record of hadith and include some reports not found in decisions of the Shafi‘i jurists.

With these creative arguments, ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi dissuaded his disciple from rashly changing his legal school. Becoming a Shafi‘i would have been a serious obstacle to ‘Abd al-Haqq’s return as an effective teacher and reformer in South Asia, where the Hanafi school predominated.
discouraging his disciple from becoming a Shafi’i, ‘Abd al-Wahhab subverted his explicit policy that everyone should choose for themselves which legal method to follow rather than be a partisan of the method into which they were born. That the shaykh blatantly disregarded his own policy reveals just how crucial he considered it that ‘Abd al-Haqq remain a Hanafi so that he could viably return to South Asia as a reformer.

‘Abd al-Wahhab also confronted his disciple over his extreme partisanship in regard to the Qadiri Order. ‘Abd al-Haqq’s partisanship was investigated in the third satchel to illustrate how fusing three orders into one was critical for the Muttaqi community’s reform efforts. This chapter revisits the issue, to show how the leader of the triple tariqa changed ‘Abd al-Haqq’s viewpoint on the matter and moderated his partisanship.

Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhab gave me legitimate certification in the books of the Sufis and their methods and initiation into these orders: the Qadiri, Shadhili, Madyani. . . . But this lowly one abridges these initiations and just calls himself “Qadiri” and is content with the nobility of this single order. I used to be excessively and zealously devoted to ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani. I used to never look to other masters or even mention their names, so absorbed was I in turning toward Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir, for he is always present for those who turn their attention toward him. Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahhab [Muttaqi] had told me, “You are certainly from among Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir’s disciples and servants. However, it is the duty of one who seeks the truth to learn from every beneficial source and also to teach whoever can learn from you [regardless of their lineage]. Never close upon yourself the door of seeking or bar the way of learning from others. From whatever source you may draw benefit, you may ascribe the blessing to the presence of your shaykh [‘Abd al-Qadir].”

‘Abd al-Wahhab conflicted many times with his disciple, who was too eager to learn any new litany or ritual with a Qadiri pedigree. He often stressed that “one should never believe that absolute perfection lies in one place and one place only; whoever claims this will induce others to denounce him and weaken his own belief.” ‘Abd al-Wahhab argued that one could have a constant spiritual orientation to Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qadir without that preventing one from taking initiation into other orders, for the method of each was beneficial. ‘Abd al-Wahhab was also a Qadiri, but his method was moderate compared with the other Qadiri masters whom ‘Abd al-Haqq met and admired, for it was tempered by being fused into the triple tariqa.

‘Abd al-Wahhab moderated his disciple’s admiration for the intellectual
elegance of existential philosophy and overtly emotional ecstasy in intoxicated states. He subtly turned ‘Abd al-Haqq’s attention away from the texts of Ibn ‘Arabi and ‘Abd al-Karim al-Jili. He never prevented him from reading these books, but when ‘Abd al-Haqq was leaving to return to Delhi, the shaykh forbade him to speak openly with others about the secrets and subtleties of existential unity. Soon after he had arrived in Delhi, ‘Abd al-Haqq received a letter from a Qadiri shaykh from Arabia that was loaded with reason-dazzling expressions about wahdat al-wujud. In his response, ‘Abd al-Haqq wrote that he admired them but was forbidden to speak of the philosophy of oneness.\footnote{70}

‘Abd al-Wahhab spent two intense years cultivating his disciple in this path of Sufism that was moderated from within (by having several orders fused together) and tempered from without (by being joined with hadith studies). Yet his disciple was still recalcitrant and headstrong, insisting on staying in Mecca or else going to Baghdad to stay at the tomb of ‘Abd al-Qadir Jilani, as depicted in the vignette that opens this chapter. The shaykh had to abandon his normally subtle arguments and strategic silences: he directly commanded ‘Abd al-Haqq to return straight to Delhi. ‘Abd al-Wahhab also ordered him to keep isolated from the worldly people who had devastated him before at the Mughal court. Further, he urged his disciple to be flexible, visit other Sufis and scholars, and maintain contacts with society. ‘Abd al-Haqq still had not fully acknowledged the role for which ‘Abd al-Wahhab had primed him, still longing to avoid the responsibilities of his mature life, which was now beginning to dawn as he prepared to sail back to South Asia.

Capital: Reform in the Mughal Heartland

‘Abd al-Haqq returned in 1592, a few months into the beginning of the new Islamic millennium. By this time, the Mughal rulers had endowed several cities with the privilege of being their capitals. Delhi had long been the imperial center of the sultanate of Delhi in its successive ruling dynasties; its last dynasty, the Lodis, invested Agra as their new capital just before the Mughals conquered them. The Mughals construct forts and palaces at Delhi and Agra while also building other capitals. ‘Abd al-Haqq had worked at Fatehpur Sikri, which housed the court from 1571 until 1585; by the time he returned to South Asia, the capital had shifted again to Lahore. In reality, the Mughal capital was wherever the peripatetic emperor’s body stood, whether in urban centers or in mobile army encampments.

While the political capital moved with the emperor, according to the shifting tides of military strategy and political expediency, Delhi retained its
central position in the Mughal heartland. It had social capital even if the political center moved periodically outside it. It was favored by both Sufi and scholarly families who sought stability outside the tumultuous life of court. Settling in Delhi, ‘Abd al-Haqq built a khanqah, training those whom he initiated into his Sufi lineages, which also served as a madrasa for teaching Islamic sciences. In the Mughal capital, he sought to unpack the symbolic capital of his sojourn in Arabia, his innovative Sufi connections, and his hadith expertise.

For thirteen years, while Emperor Akbar reigned (until his death in 1605 at Agra), Shaykh ‘Abd al-Haqq kept a low profile. However, when Akbar was succeeded by Jahangir, the shaykh tried to spread his reformist ideals among Mughal nobility and even to the new emperor himself. ‘Abd al-Haqq drew from his overseas experience with the Muttaqi community to convert his symbolic capital into social clout. He aimed to alter the course of Islamic society under the Mughal ruler, noting in one of his letters, “This prayer in Arabic has come down to us from the greatest Shaykhs: ‘Oh God, keep sound our ruler and his community, our shepherd and his flock, and unite their hearts in doing good.’” He would eventually try to guide the new emperor’s boat to safety through the seas of justice and benevolence. However, those political seas would be tumultuous.

During his initial period of quiet and calm, ‘Abd al-Haqq circulated works he had begun in Mecca, instigated by ‘Abd al-Wahhab Muttaqi. He gained renown as a hadith expert and turned his skills to practical use in writing Persian commentaries on the major collections of hadith, in the hopes that other scholars and Sufis would integrate the meanings of the reports into their own juridical, devotional, and literary work. In addition to hadith texts, he authored extensive translations of Arabic works into Persian, mainly from books on Sufism. ‘Abd al-Haqq would often rework an Arabic text with a fuller commentary in Persian, perhaps with a direct translation of the text into Persian.

His most complete theoretical work is a dual composition of this nature. ‘Abd al-Haqq first wrote a Persian treatise entitled Maraj al-Bahrayn fi Jam‘ bayn al-Ṭarīqayn, or “The Meeting of Two Oceans and the Joining of Two Paths.” He explained that the book aimed to join the two paths of jurisprudence and mysticism. One could think of this as uniting the dual aspects of religious life: “joining righteous comportment [shari‘a] to refined character [ṭariqa], or outer manifestation [zāhir] to inner potential [bātin], or appearance [sūrat] to essence [ma‘nā], or covering [qashr] to core [lubb], or religious knowledge [‘ilm] to spiritual state [ḥal], or sobriety [ṣahw] to intoxication [sukr], or
ritual exactness [madhhab] to spiritual acumen [mashrab], or reason [ʿaql] to passion [ʿishq].”75 In this work, he argues that Sufism is an integral part of Islam, one that is fully compatible with jurisprudence and scriptural scholarship; in fact, the disciplines of jurisprudence and scriptural studies are not complete without Sufism. In its medieval elaboration, Ḥaqq explains, Sufism had become separated from jurisprudence—partly because of Sufi masters who were not educated enough and partly because of jurists and hadith scholars who were jealous of Sufi masters and their spiritual accomplishment. In the natural growth of religious disciplines of knowledge, Sufism and jurisprudence had evolved into separate branches with specialized terminology and distinct regimes of training. Thus separate, each was incomplete. They needed to be rejoined in order to revive authentic Islam.76

In order to achieve this revival, Ḥaqq advocated the Muttaqi method. He rendered Zarruq’s ideas in Persian in thirteen chapters, each entitled a qaʿida, a principle or rule, in imitation of Zarruq’s original text.78 Ḥaqq claimed that Zarruq was among “the greatest contemporary scholars and grandest Sufi masters of North Africa, as all the shaykhs of the Arab lands concur. I quote extensively from his book, Qawāʿid al-Ṭarīqa fiʾl-Jamʿ bayn al-Sharīʿa waʾl-Ḥaqīqa.79 Because all the people of truth and masters of realization speak the same message, quoting the words of one of them is the same as quoting from many of them.”80 Ḥaqq was careful to disguise the innovative quality of Zarruq’s writing, presenting his book as the distillation of five centuries of Sufi theoretical prose that began with Junayd (d. 910). After citing Junayd as the architect of sober Sufi discourse of intellectual Sufism attentive to the shariʿa, he launches into his exposition of Zarruq’s ideals. “Because the expressions in this book [Qawāʿid al-Ṭarīqa] are subtle and eloquent, I took the liberty of explaining them in more words and paragraphs, but I have not added meanings beyond the original intent of Shaykh Zarruq’s discourse. If I am accompanied by divine favor, I will write these meanings out more fully in another book, as time allows and by God’s will.”81 This promise he fulfilled; he turned to composing an Arabic text that presented the same ideas in a fuller and more detailed way.

This fuller Arabic explanation is titled “Achieving Acquaintance for Insight into the Equivalence of Sufism and Jurisprudence” (“Taḥṣīl al-Ṭaʿarruf fī Maʾrifat al-Fiqh waʾl-Ṭaṣawwuf”). It has never been published or translated: it lies in manuscript form at the Reza Library archives at Rampur. Because it gives a much fuller treatment of the subject than the Persian text that has
been published with an Urdu translation for modern readers, this book offers the following translated excerpts from manuscript sources. In its ornamental introduction, he elucidates his purpose by presenting Sufi saints and legal scholars as parallel authorities who, though diverged in the past, must rejoin in the present.

In the name of God, the merciful, the compassionate. Praise be to God who for all sufficed, and peace be upon the servants whom God purified, especially upon their chief and leader, Muhammad the specially selected. Peace be also upon his family and companions, the most special followers of the religion of surety, those who take refuge on the bench of the brethren of purity. Peace be upon the saints of this community, the revivers of the true religion and exemplars of the folk of divinity. Peace be also upon its scholars, the preservers of *shari'ah* ordinances, and upon all those who follow their blessed guidance.

This book is by a weak one who is impoverished depending on his God, the powerful One beyond need, namely ʿAbd al-Haqq Dihlawi, the son of Sayf al-Din, belonging to the Qadiri Order and the Hanafi School of law. This book is entitled “Achieving Acquaintance for Insight into the Equivalence of Sufism and Jurisprudence.” It documents the spiritual states of the Sufis and jurists. It comprises two parts: the first part is on Sufism and the second part is on jurisprudence. For the first part, I extracted statements from the writings of the realized sages who join together these two paths, may God be merciful with them.

You should know that Sufis offer different definitions of Sufism, but all of them center upon this one core meaning: refining one’s moral character and purifying one’s inner life, taking on virtues of perfection and adopting qualities of God the transcendent, perseverance in the way of truth and preserving the rights of others, focusing the heart on God alone and dismissing all that is other than God, passing away from lowly human qualities and achieving faith in religion, renouncing worldly ambition by fleeing vanity and choosing anonymity, taking on the duties of piety and pursuing the love of divinity. Once, Junayd was asked about Sufism. He answered, “It is purifying the heart from reliance upon people, severing base qualities, quelling the lowly human character, avoiding egoistic claims, embracing the descent of spiritual qualities, depending upon disciplines of divine knowledge, implementing the first principle for eternity, advising the entire community, staying faithful to God in reality, following the Prophet—upon him be peace and blessings—in his custom, and doing all such things that increase in people blessings.”82
ʿAbd al-Haqq begins his discourse by quoting Junayd, just as he did in “The Meeting of Two Oceans.” He starts with Junayd because he is the undisputed founder of Sufi theoretical prose. ʿAbd al-Haqq then moves quickly to discuss Shaykh Zarruq, as if there were not five centuries of Sufi experiment, expansion, and exposition between the two learned writers. In his view, Junayd began the intellectual exposition of Sufism, while Zarruq summed it up.

According to ʿAbd al-Haqq, just as Junayd’s clarity began the evolution of Sufism as an Islamic discipline of knowledge (as he coined the term, “Knowledge of Hearts” as a cipher for Sufism), Zarruq’s concision would end the diverse proliferation of Sufi paths by uniting them with hadith and jurisprudence.

In his book “Principles of Sufism,” the learned shaykh and moderate sage Ahmad Zarruq writes that “Sufism has been delimited and institutionalized and explained in thousands of ways but all of them center upon sincerity in turning attention toward God. The varieties express different aspects of that [sincerity].”83 This sentence is the general summary, and all Sufi sayings that come subsequently express its details. Sufis have individually expressed the details in accord with what each has earned in knowledge, practice, state, and realization. Whoever has been granted a bit of sincerity in focusing on God thus has been granted a bit of Sufism. The Sufism of each person is the sincerity of that person’s turning attention toward God.84 But sincerity is conditioned by being pleasing to God—meaning with right faith—and in ways that satisfy God—meaning with proper worship—for that which is conditioned is not acceptable without its condition. . . . Nobody can be a Sufi without jurisprudence \([\text{fiqh}]\), because divine orders can be known only through jurisprudence. Nor is jurisprudence sound with Sufism, for action cannot be carried out without sincerity in turning towards God. There is neither jurisprudence nor Sufism without faith, because both of them are only sound when based on firm faith. One must join them together as integral, just as souls are integral to bodies.85

ʿAbd al-Haqq admired Zarruq’s “Usuli approach” to Sufi practice, which was the chosen method of the Muttaqi community. Usuli scholars endeavored to explain the principles upon which practices were based and to check that all behaviors drew nourishment from deep scriptural roots. ʿAbd al-Haqq paraphrased Zarruq’s principles, simplifying their rarefied prose and providing compelling examples and explanations for his new South Asian audience.

Jurisprudence is based on the root foundation of submission \([\text{islām}]\) and theology is based on faith \([\text{iman}]\). The root foundation of being a Sufi is
the station of virtue [*iḥsan*] as explained by the Prophet Muhammad, who said, “Doing what is beautiful is worshipping God as if you see God, and if you cannot see God then know that God is seeing you.” Sufi practice is one part of the religion that the Prophet explicated to Gabriel, so his companions might learn of its totality. It is related that the Prophet’s companion Mālik ibn Anas [d. 795] said: “One who follows the Sufi path while neglecting jurisprudence is a heretic, while one who learns jurisprudence while neglecting the Sufi path commits transgression. However, one who conjoins both has attained to realization of the Truth.”

Before ʿAbd al-Haqq, many Sufi scholars from South Asia sought to translate theoretical works written in Arabic for the Persian reading world. The difference is that ʿAbd al-Haqq projected the engagement with Arabic learning as part of a wider strategy to limit Sufi devotion within the parameters of hadith and jurisprudence. That strategy was central to the Muttaqi method, and its foundation was the previous scholarship of Ahmad Zarruq.

ʿAbd al-Haqq pursued this strategy not just in formal books but also in the less formal medium of letters. He preserved them in a volume of his collected letters, or *Maktūbāt*. This volume includes sixty-eight letters written to specific recipients, including Sufis, legal scholars, and Mughal nobles. They were given formal titles and a short prose introduction when collected and published by his eldest son, Muḥammad Nūr al-Haqq (d. 1663), to whom the majority of them were addressed.

This poor humble one, ʿAbd al-Haqq son of Sayf al-Dīn, has a number of letters which he wrote according to the demands of the time and the needs of his audience. Some were addressed to his inner circle and close companions among the Sufis [*ahl-e sulūk o irādat*], while others were sent to nobles and rulers who are pious [*umārāʾ o mulūk az ahl-e saʿādat*]. Others were sent by others to give me advice, which are nearer and dearer to me than all the others. I have been ordered to speak only about affairs of religious scholarship and communal welfare that will further promote and revive Islamic custom [*tarwīj o tajdīd-e sharīʿat*] while preserving the beliefs and commands of the Prophet’s example [*sunna*]. I am commanded to not step beyond the circle of moderation [*iʿtidāl*] and the bounds of precaution [*iḥtiyāt*]. I was told not to employ the metaphors of existential philosophers [*wujūdiyya*] or the interpretations of spiritualist adventurers [*bāṭiniyya*]. My Sufi master advised this poor fellow: “Do not speak of cosmic realities and existential subtleties but rather explain to the people knowledge that will improve their behavior and help them
desist from sins. Never give precedence to spiritual discipline over legal discipline, just as you should never rely on legal correctness to the exclusion of spiritual refinement.” In accord with this advice, this weak one has, in most all of his writings and compositions, relayed quotes from the esteemed Sufi masters and made reference to the leading scholars, namely those who join the two paths [jāmiʿ al-ṭariqayn] and harmonize the two groups, meaning the Sufis and scholars. 88

ʿAbd al-Haqq’s letters provide crucial evidence about his intention and authority after moving back to South Asia, as guided by the Muttaqi method. He relayed quotes from those Sufi masters who “joined the two paths” of scriptural knowledge and mystical discipline. Of course, Zarruq and his own Muttaqi masters were the paragons of this method, and he quoted from them liberally throughout his letters.

After establishing his own madrasa, ʿAbd al-Haqq took a further initiation in the Naqshbandi Order from Khwāja Muḥammad Bāqī Bīʾllāh (d. 1603). ʿAbd al-Haqq already had two initiations in the Qadiri Order, one as family inheritance and one from his youth. As he matured, he took initiation with the Muttaqi community in the triple tariqa that fused the Qadiri, Shadhili, and Madyani Orders; with it, he additionally received initiation in the Chishti Order that Shaykh ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi carried from his youthful wanderings. 89 Despite his initiation into the multiple orders, the Naqshbandi Order was newly ascendant in Mughal domains. Initiation in it was a valued addition as ʿAbd al-Haqq sought to root his authority in the Mughal capital, to guide its nobility, and to shape its scholars. From the time of Babur, Mughal rulers had ancestral connections to the Naqshbandi Order from their origins in Central Asia because the order’s founder, Bahāʾ al-Dīn Naqshband, was buried in Bukhara.

Like most Naqshbandis of this era, Khwaja Baqi Bīʾllāh was born in Central Asia (in Kabul). In his youth, he studied hadith and scripture, determined to become a jurist. Once an ecstatic Sufi (majdhūb) recited to him a line of poetry disparaging Hanafi jurists and their dry scholarship. 90 “Will you ever find God in Kanz or Hidāya or some legal book? / There is no better tome than the heart—it’s just there! Take a look!” This verse stirred his imagination, and he set off on a journey to learn from Sufi masters, which took him eventually to Delhi. Historian of South Asian Sufism Khaliq Ahmad Nizami notes his surprising combination of “the sternness of an Usuli scholar and the gentleness of a Sufi sage.” 91 Though born three generations after the great Naqshbandi systematizer ʿUbaydallāh Aḥrār (d. 1490), Baqi Bīʾllāh was known as “Sultan...
of the Naqshbandis” in South Asia. As Baqi Bi’llah’s fame spread in Delhi, ʿAbd al-Haqq took initiation with him after a dream vision of Shaykh ʿAbd al-Qadir Jilani urged him to do so. As a Naqshbandi, ʿAbd al-Haqq forged strategic alliances with the forces of reform and social activism that were rising in Delhi at that time; in these Naqshbandi networks, he circulated the ideals of the Muttaqi community without labeling them as such.

ʿAbd al-Haqq’s compilation of letters is one of his most important and intimate writings. He ordered them collected and penned a short introduction to them. The first six letters, those he deemed most important, were addressed to Baqi Bi’llah. They offer his critiques of various religious movements that flourished in the time of Akbar, thus giving himself the reputation of an avid reformer that was to make him so renowned during his later years in Delhi and after his death.

The first letter is written to Baqi Bi’llah and ʿAbd al-Haqq and titled “Sulūk Ṭarīq al-Falāḥ ʿind Faqī al-Ṭarbiya bi-l-Istilāḥ,” or “Traveling the Path of Felicitous Renown When Lacking Sufi Training as It Is Customarily Known.” This letter is based on the famous saying of Zarruq’s master Shaykh Ahmad ibn ʿUqba al-Hadrami (discussed in the second satchel) stating that Sufi training as it had existed in former times was no longer valid and instead must be fused with learning scriptural knowledge. This letter communicates the ideals of Zarruq’s short treatise on the death of self-will and ʿAli Muttaqi’s elaboration upon it. The second letter, titled “Uṣūl al-Ṭarīqa li-Kashf al-Ḥaqqā,” or “Sufism’s Sources’ Exposure for Spiritual Reality’s Disclosure,” deals with Zarruq’s Uṣūl al-Ṭarīqa. The third letter is titled “Tabyīn al-Ṭurūq li-Ahl al-Irāda bi-ʿIlīzām Waẓāʾif al-Khayr waʾl-ʿIbāda,” or “Exposition of the Paths for the Folk with Sufi Initiation with Admonition for Disciplines of Worship and Devotion,” which plays off the title of ʿAli Muttaqi’s first treatise, “Tabyīn al-Ṭurūq ilā ʿIlāh,” or “Exposition of the Paths to God.” Through these letters, ʿAbd al-Haqq continued the project of ʿAli Muttaqi to transfer Zarruq’s critical assessment of Sufism to a South Asian audience that had never encountered him directly.

It is an open question just how ʿAbd al-Haqq and Baqi Bi’llah interacted, and in what ways they influenced each other’s conceptions of reform. His letters to the Naqshbandi master offer critiques of various religious movements of his era. A prime example is the fifth letter, addressed to Baqi Bi’llah, which ʿAbd al-Haqq titled “Taḥṣīl al-Kamāl al-Abādī bi-l-Ikhtiyār al-Faqr al-Muḥammadi,” or “Achieving the Completion of Eternity by Choosing the Muḥammadian Poverty.” ʿAbd al-Wahhab had introduced ʿAbd al-Haqq to the book that is the topic of this letter, “Al-Faqr al-Muḥammadi” (“Muḥammadian Poverty”), and...
had critically considered it with him. Discussing this book gave ʿAbd al-Haqq the vehicle to express his dissatisfaction with many elements of religious life in Delhi under Mughal rule.

Yet ʿAbd al-Haqq’s initiation with Baqi Biʾllah obscured the sources of his reformist program. Many scholars assume that Baqi Biʾllah—and thus the Naqshbandi Order as a whole—conveyed to ʿAbd al-Haqq the ideals of Sufi reform through revival of shariʿa. However, ʿAbd al-Haqq had by this time already taken initiation into the triple tariqa, absorbed its ideals, and learned its methods from ʿAbd al-Wahhab Muttaqi. His initiation with Baqi Biʾllah was more like an alliance of like-minded reformers than an initiation of an inferior disciple to a superior master. Both tone and content of their correspondence affirm this, demonstrating that ʿAbd al-Haqq conveyed as much about reform to the Naqshbandi master as he accepted from him. Many of his letters to Baqi Biʾllah introduce ideas or actual texts of Ahmad Zarruq and ʿAli Muttaqi.

After Akbar died in 1605, ʿAbd al-Haqq adopted a more assertive position. He took initiative to contact and advise nobles who were close to the new Mughal emperor. He first wrote a letter to Shaykh Farīd Bukhārī (d. 1615), who held the position of royal treasurer (mīr bakhshī) and then governor of Ahmedabad and later governor of Punjab. Shaykh Farid helped Akbar’s son Prince Salīm to take the throne under the name Jahangir. For his support, Shaykh Farid was granted the title Murtaḍā Khān and enjoyed the trust of the new emperor. He was sympathetic to Sufis but like many nobles was addicted to alcohol. ʿAbd al Haqq intended the letter to reach the new emperor through Shaykh Farid. This letter reveals his sly eloquence and cautious approach to reform. A full translation of it is included in the digital version of this work, in appendix E.

ʿAbd al Haqq catches his nobleman’s attention with a hair-raising tale about a hunter who becomes the hunted, as a man—chased by a tiger—leaps down a dry well to escape only to find himself suspended above a deadly serpent by grabbing desperately at a straw that mice are steadily chewing. The mice represent time, the tiger is this world, and the serpent is damnation in the next world. Death hunts down each person regardless of his or her station or power in this world; it spurs us on to face the spiritual challenge of purifying the heart before it is too late. ʿAbd al-Haqq explains this challenge through nobility’s common obsession, sexual pleasure. “The spirit is by nature sacred and holy, but it is brought low by its relationship to the body and by its mingling with the ego; it is made passionately attached to the ego and, getting mixed,
it goes astray. The relationship of the spirit to the ego is exactly like the relationship of a man with his wife, and their interpenetration produces a subtle energy center [\textit{laṭīfa}] called the heart."

His ethical and theological discourse decried the arrogance of rulers who thought themselves divine, above death, or beyond the Prophet’s example. ‘Abd al-Haqq treaded on dangerous territory, for Emperor Akbar’s mature rule boldly departed from prior Islamic norms of governance and appealed to more universal norms of divine kingship. Akbar had taken as his advisor a radical Mahdawi intellectual, Shaykh Mubarak, and had elevated his two sons, Abu’l-Fadl and Faydi, as powerful courtiers. They led him to downplay the authority of Sunni scholars in the court and to declare himself to be a just ruler who was divinely guided to decide matters of religion as well as state.

In an effort to integrate Rajput warriors and Iranian Shi‘i nobility into his administration, Akbar had integrated elements of Hindu and Zoroastrian ritual into court life. While he never claimed to be a “prophet” per se, Akbar appealed to religious ideals far beyond the bounds of Sunni orthodoxy in his bold claims to authority as a universal emperor. ‘Abd al-Haqq did not name Akbar in his letter yet critiqued rulers who claimed divine guidance as a kind of intoxication with worldly power.

No ruler can claim to excel the Prophet, argued ‘Abd al-Haqq. Rather, a spiritual quest is required for all people, including nobles and rulers, who are not exempt from the challenge to walk humbly and purify their souls under the guidance of a prophet. ‘Abd al-Haqq employed hadith reports to compare worldly life to the sleep of neglect and spiritual torpor: “People are sleeping and only upon dying do they wake.”97 One can wake up only by dying to the ego, which means living by the guidance of the Prophet. ‘Abd al-Haqq wrote in rhyming prose, “The human being is captive to countless trials and tribulations. About their details we obsessively think, and into worrying about them we inevitably sink, until they scatter our energies to the brink. For this reason, the Prophet Muhammad said in a hadith, ‘If you knew what I know, you would laugh less and weep more.’”98

This was the greater jihad of spiritual striving, which was manifest in all kinds of renunciation and acts of justice. In this way, ‘Abd al-Haqq presented Sufism to appeal to nobles and rulers and ended his letter with subtle allusions to the Muttaqi method based on the writings of Zarruq. Like ‘Ali Muttaqi before him, he argued that there was a style of Sufism to suit people of each class and profession. Thus, nobles and rulers were not exempted from following the \textit{shari‘a}, and they could perfect their spiritual life while still pursuing
their worldly duties with the proper discipline (adab) and spiritual principle (qa‘ida).

This letter must have been received by Shaykh Farid with approval, for there followed an intricate correspondence. We do not have the letters that the Mughal noble sent to ‘Abd al-Haqq, but we do have several that the Sufi scholar sent to him. These include a letter explaining the four types of people, with the most blessed category being nobles who rule justly and piously. With these letters, ‘Abd al-Haqq probed to see if Shaykh Farid would serve as his channel of communication with the new Mughal emperor, Akbar’s rebellious son Jahangir.

As ‘Abd al-Haqq contemplated approaching the Mughal emperor directly, he stood squarely in the footsteps of ‘Ali Muttaqi. It was up to him to embody the Muttaqi method in a new and challenging environment. This chapter unpacked the satchel containing elements of the personas and activities of ‘Ali Muttaqi’s followers as they upheld his legacy in South Asia, from where it had been ejected. ‘Ali Muttaqi was dead, but ‘Abd al-Haqq faced a final challenge to put into practice his principles of moderation, justice, and reform. The way that ‘Abd al-Haqq did this would obscure the memory of ‘Ali Muttaqi even as it perpetuated his mission, and it would place ‘Abd al-Haqq’s own life in peril.